

Chicago, and Laura and I are honored to have it here at the White House.

I want to thank the Kol Sasson from the great University of Maryland for joining us today, and thank you for lending your beautiful voice for this occasion.

Tonight as we prepare to light the candles, we hope and pray that all who live under tyranny will see their day of freedom and that the light of faith will always shine through the darkness. We also pray for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, many of whom are spending the holiday season far from home and their loved ones. We are grateful for their service to America. We're grateful for the support and sacrifice of their families.

And now, Jacob Murphy and Sidney Hallem will help us light the candles. Their fathers are serving in our United States Armed Forces with distinction and with honor.

[At this point, the menorah was lit.]

Holiday Travel

Q. Mr. President, do you have any words for Americans who are worried about traveling this holiday season?

The President. My words are these: Our Government is doing everything we can to protect our country. We've got a lot of really decent, hard-working Americans who will be working over the holiday season to do everything we can to protect Americans from harm. And I want to thank them for their efforts, thank them for their hard work. American citizens need to go about their lives, but as they do so, they need to know that governments at all levels are working as hard as we possibly can to protect the American citizens.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:32 p.m. in the Bookseller's Area in the East Wing at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to a cappella singing group Kol Sasson.

Christmas Message to the Members of the Armed Forces

December 24, 2003

Laura and I send greetings to the men and women of our military. Many of you are far from home during the holidays. We know you miss the people you love, especially this time of year. Your family and friends and fellow citizens miss you too—and our whole country is proud of you.

All who serve in our military are protecting the American people in a time of challenge and danger. You are confronting terrorists abroad so that we don't have to face them in our own country, and so that people around the world can live in peace. By spreading freedom and democracy, you are making our future more secure.

As your Commander in Chief, I am proud of every one of you. Some of your comrades have been wounded, and we pray for their recovery. Some have given their lives. This Nation will never forget their service and sacrifice, and in this holiday season we pray that God will comfort the families they left behind.

The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity. Americans are blessed to have men and women like you protecting us, and defending the cause of freedom across the world. May God bless you, and may He watch over our country.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This message was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 25 and follows the text as printed in the December 24 edition of USA Today. An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Statement on the Earthquake in Iran

December 26, 2003

Laura and I heard this morning of the earthquake centered in the city of Bam, Iran. We are greatly saddened by the loss of life,

injuries, and widespread damage to this ancient city. I extend my condolences to all those touched by this tragedy. The thoughts of all Americans are with the victims and their families at this time, and we stand ready to help the people of Iran.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

December 20

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal to discuss the capture of former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. He then had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan to discuss the situations in Iraq, North Korea, and Libya, and the upcoming trip to Japan of James A. Baker III, the President's personal envoy on the issue of Iraqi debt.

Later in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Hu Jintao of China to discuss the situations in Taiwan, Iraq, and North Korea, and Presidential Envoy Baker's upcoming trip to China.

December 22

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq, and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to discuss the situation in Iraq. He also met with the Homeland Security Council.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea to discuss the situations in Iraq and North Korea and Presidential Envoy Baker's upcoming trip to South Korea.

In the afternoon, the President met with rabbis and Jewish community leaders in the Roosevelt Room. Later, he and Mrs. Bush traveled to Alexandria, VA, and then returned to Washington, DC.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush went to Camp David, MD.

December 23

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The President announced his intention to appoint Eloise Anderson as a member of the Board of Directors of the Student Loan Marketing Association.

December 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, the President had telephone conversations with members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

December 25

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, the President celebrated Christmas with family members.

December 26

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he and Mrs. Bush traveled to the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX.

The President announced the recess appointment of Albert Casey as a Governor of the U.S. Postal Service.

The President announced the recess appointment of Bradley D. Belt as a member of the Social Security Advisory Board.

The President announced the recess appointment of Raymond Simon as Assistant Secretary of Education for Elementary and Secondary Education.

The President announced the recess appointments of Gay Hart Gaines and Claudia Puig as members of the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The President announced the recess appointment of Fayza Veronique Boulad Rodman as a member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors.